United Nations A/58/PV.92

General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

92nd plenary meeting
Thursday, 1 July 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Agenda item 124 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

The President: Before proceeding to the items for this meeting, I should like to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/58/855. It contains the text of a letter dated 29 June 2004 from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that 16 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years".

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in document A/58/855?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 47 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the outcome of the twenty-sixth special session: implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

Draft resolution (A/58/L.65)

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held its debate on this agenda item at its 3rd to 6th plenary meetings and adopted resolution 58/236 at its 78th plenary meeting.

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/58/L.65. I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Chen (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): By operative paragraphs 1 and 3 (a) of draft resolution A/58/L.65, the General Assembly would decide that the high-level meeting to review the progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS will be convened on 2 June 2005 and that the high-level meeting shall comprise opening and closing plenary meetings and interactive round tables covering areas related to the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. It is understood that there would be short opening and closing plenary meetings and approximately five round tables with simultaneous interpretation in six languages. Documentation requirements are for three 40-page pre-session

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

04-41071 (E)

documents, one five-page in-session document and one five-page post-session document.

Should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/58/L.65, there would be no additional costs involved for the servicing of the plenary meetings and two of the round-table sessions. The remaining three round table sessions would not require significant conference services support, and the related additional costs would be absorbed from within the resources already available under section 2 of the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/58/L.65, entitled "Organizational arrangements for the high-level meeting to review the progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/58/L.65?

Draft resolution A/58/L.65 was adopted (resolution 313).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 47?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 59 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Draft resolution (A/58/L.64)

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held its debate on this agenda item, together with agenda items 55, 57 and 58, at its 43rd to 46th plenary meetings.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/58/L.64, entitled "Participation of the Holy See in the work of the United Nations".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/58/L.64?

Draft resolution A/58/L.64 was adopted (resolution 314).

The President: In accordance with the resolution just adopted, I now call upon the observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): I should like to thank the General Assembly for its adoption by consensus of this resolution, on the participation of the Holy See in the work of the United Nations, under agenda item 59. The adoption of this resolution could not have come at a more auspicious time, as this year the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See is happily celebrating the fortieth anniversary of its presence at the Organization.

In the context of strengthening the role of the United Nations and revitalizing the work of the General Assembly, the adoption of this resolution is an important step forward and reflects the lofty values and collective interests shared by the Holy See and the United Nations.

We are committed to the same objectives, which necessitate the protection of fundamental human rights, the preservation of the dignity and worth of the human person and the promotion of the common good. To achieve those goals the international community must build upon the strong edifice of law — law not of whim and caprice, but of principles stemming from the very universality of human nature, which can guide human reason into the future. With an edifice built on such principles guiding our efforts, we can be assured of success in our common quest for lasting, universal justice and peace.

Let me say a word of warm thanks to you, Mr. President, for your unflinching and much-appreciated willingness to submit draft resolution A/58/L.64 as a presidential text. My gratitude goes also to the staff of the Office of the President and of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management for their kind support. Through you, Sir, I wish also to thank the facilitator of the draft resolution, Ambassador Marcello Spatafora, Permanent Representative of Italy, for having assisted you and for having so skilfully and efficiently facilitated the consultations on the draft resolution, which led to a successful conclusion. I would be remiss if I failed to offer a word of gratitude to the many Permanent Representatives who expressed to me their Governments' support for the draft resolution just adopted. Last but not least, my thanks go as well to all Member States for their invaluable support in the adoption of the resolution.

The President: I wish to add my own thanks to Ambassador Marcello Spatafora for his successful facilitation of the draft resolution we have just adopted.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 59.

Agenda item 85 (*continued*)

Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects

Report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) (A/58/474/Add.1)

The President: Under this item, a second report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) has been issued as document A/58/474/Add.1.

I call on the Rapporteur of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), Mr. Damien Cole of Ireland, to introduce the report of the Committee.

Mr. Cole (Ireland), Rapporteur of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee): It is an honour for me to present to the General Assembly document A/58/474/Add.1, which contains the report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), on agenda item 85, entitled "Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects". With the presentation today of document A/58/474/Add.1, which recommends the adoption of a draft resolution submitted to the General Assembly under item 85, the reporting obligations of the Fourth Committee for and to this session of the General Assembly are fulfilled.

During the first part of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee considered the item at its 8th to 11th meetings, and at the resumed session, at its 26th meeting, held on 23 June 2004. At the resumed session, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee examined the report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (A/58/19), and adopted a draft resolution without a vote.

The draft resolution submitted under item 85 is contained in paragraph 8 of the report. In its operative paragraphs, the draft resolution recommended by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) welcomes the report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations; endorses the proposals, recommendations and conclusions of the Special Committee contained in paragraphs 29 to 177 of its report (A/58/19); urges Member States to take all necessary steps to implement them; reiterates the conditions under which personnel-contributing countries may become members of the Special Committee; decides that the Special Committee shall continue its efforts; and requests it to submit a report on its work to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

I now have the honour to present to the Assembly for its consideration and adoption the draft resolution contained in paragraph 8 of document A/58/474/Add.1, entitled "Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects".

The President: If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) that is before it today.

It was so decided.

The President: Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of vote or position.

Before we begin to take action on the draft resolution recommended in the report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take a decision in the same manner as was done in the Committee, unless notified otherwise in advance.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) in paragraph 8 of its report (A/58/474/Add.1). The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) adopted the draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 58/315).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 85?

It was so decided.

The President: The Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of all the reports of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

Agenda item 55 (*continued*)

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Draft resolution (A/58/L.66)

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held its debate on this agenda item, together with agenda items 57, 58 and 59, at its 43rd to 46th plenary meetings, and that it adopted resolution 58/126 at its 76th plenary meeting.

The General Assembly will now proceed to consider draft resolution A/58/L.66.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Chen (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to inform representatives that, under the terms of paragraph 1 (b) in part A of the annex to draft resolution A/58/L.66, "Reordering the work of the General Assembly", paragraphs 3 (c) and (e) in part C, "Practices and working methods of the Main Committees", paragraphs 4 (a) through (l) in part D, "Review of the agenda of the General Assembly", paragraphs 5 (b) through (f) in part E, "General Committee", and paragraph 6 in part F, "Documentation", the General Assembly would change its pattern of meetings as compared to the current practice.

With regard to meetings servicing and documentation, should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/58/L.66 — on the understanding that the draft resolution does not imply the holding of more plenary meetings of the Assembly or meetings of the General Committee or the Main Committees, in total, than has been the pattern in recent years, and that documentation requirements for those meetings will not increase either — the conference servicing implications of the proposed changes are of an organizational and conference-management nature, and as such will not require additional resources.

With regard to the provision and enhancement of web sites of the Main Committees, this would involve development, design and, subsequently, regular updates and maintenance in all six languages of the United Nations. Further analysis and study would need to be made in the months to come to assess the financial implications. The Secretariat will need to revert to the General Assembly with such cost estimates in due course.

The President: Before proceeding further, I should like to propose a minor revision to the annex to draft resolution A/58/L.66. I should like to propose that, in the absence of objection, paragraph 4 (e) of the annex be deleted.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to that proposal?

It was so decided.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/58/L.66, entitled "Further measures for the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly", as orally revised.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to adopt draft resolution A/58/L.66, as orally revised?

Draft resolution A/58/L.66, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 58/316).

The President: In connection with the adoption of draft resolution A/58/L.66, I should like to invite the attention of representatives to paragraph 4 (f) of the annex of the draft resolution, regarding the item entitled "Information and communication technologies for development".

Notwithstanding the fact that the item would be allocated to the Second Committee for annual consideration, I propose that, if there is no objection, under that item, the report of the World Summit on the Information Society — the second phase of which is to be held in Tunis in 2005 — will be considered directly in plenary meeting at the sixtieth session.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to that proposal?

It was so decided.

The President: Before giving the floor to those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Haraguchi (Japan): I should like, first of all, to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your efforts leading to the adoption of resolution 58/316. I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your initiative in revitalizing the General Assembly. I would also like to express gratitude to the six facilitators for their efforts in drafting the resolution. Japan has been actively participating in the discussion on the revitalization of the General Assembly. Although we might have done more to rationalize the Assembly's work, especially with respect to the further streamlining of the agenda, I nevertheless appreciate the resolution that we have adopted today as a first step towards more substantial reform of the General Assembly in the future.

During the consultations, we learned that there would be great difficulty in rescheduling the work of the Main Committees over two periods during the session. I am convinced, however, that there is still room for us to benefit more from further rationalizing the work of the General Assembly. I believe, therefore, that it is our task — the task of the Member States — to continue the work in this direction, building on what we agreed in the resolution.

Mr. Van den Berg (Netherlands): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

In December 2003, aware of the need to enhance the authority and role of the General Assembly and to improve its working methods, we agreed on an ambitious work plan. Today we are drawing up the balance sheet of our work to date.

We welcome the resolution just adopted. It constitutes a significant step forward in the revitalization process. In addition to decisions already taken last December, we have now agreed to make the agenda more accessible, to adopt or expand innovative working methods, to streamline the agenda of the plenary and to strengthen the role of the General Committee. Moreover, we have agreed on new goals, focusing on the rationalization of the agendas of the Main Committees, for which we have set a firm deadline, as well as on tackling the volume of documentation.

Acceptable as this outcome may be, we feel that we could and should have aimed higher. If we really want the General Assembly to play its role as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations — as our heads of State or Government pledged in the Millennium Declaration — we have to pursue our work with even more vigour. We have a common goal, and we need to translate it into a common strategy. We understand that that cannot be done overnight. Nevertheless, we have to realize that time is not on our side. The world outside these walls is changing rapidly, and we have to keep pace.

Although revitalization is a continuous process and we are not there yet, we would never have made it this far, Mr. President, without your strong leadership and determination. The very fact that we have adopted this resolution today, on 1 July, underscores that you are a man who does what he says, and says what he does. We have not always made your work easier, but you have carried on undauntedly, bringing us to where we are today. Allow me to commend you, Sir, as well as your staff, for the excellent work you have done. In my capacity as one of the facilitators, I would like to thank you for the trust you placed in us. It was an honour to serve you.

The EU has been and remains fully committed to the revitalization process, as part of a wider effort to work for an effective multilateralism with a strong United Nations at its centre, and will ensure that its support for this process continues. Starting tomorrow, we will actively contribute to the implementation of the decisions we have taken today, in the plenary as well as in the Main Committees.

Mr. Baali (Algeria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement Working Group on United Nations Reform and Revitalization of the General Assembly.

The Movement welcomes the adoption by consensus of the resolution on further measures for the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, contained in document A/58/66. Resolution 58/126 of 19 December 2003 and the one just adopted represent an important step towards more substantive improvements aimed at a genuine revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, bearing in mind that the ultimate goal of the ongoing process is to enable the Assembly to play its role effectively "as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations", as outlined in paragraph 30 of the Millennium Declaration.

The Movement would like to express its deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for the strong leadership and the extraordinary commitment you have shown as well as for the tireless efforts you have made throughout the long and rather complex process which led to the adoption, on schedule, of this landmark resolution.

The Non-Aligned Movement looks forward to the follow-up to the provisions contained in the two resolutions at the forthcoming sessions and stresses the need to ensure the effective, full and proper implementation of the provisions of resolution 58/126 as well as those of the resolution just adopted.

In that context, the Movement would like to highlight the following points regarding the content of the resolution.

Concerning section B, entitled "Organization of the agenda of the General Assembly", the Movement stresses that this arrangement, which is to be reviewed in its entirety at the sixty-first session, is solely for the purpose of illustration and will neither prejudge nor adversely affect the way in which the work of the Assembly is organized and carried out, in particular regarding the format of meetings at which plenary and other agenda items are considered, as well as the submission of, action on and scope of draft resolutions.

Concerning section C, entitled "Practices and working methods of the Main Committees", the Movement underlines the need for all Main Committees to be bound by the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, as stated in paragraph 3 of that section, and for all Member States to be actively involved in the process of the implementation of the various provisions of the section.

With regard to section D, entitled "Review of the agenda of the General Assembly", the Movement stresses the importance of the agreed principle of consultation with, and consent of, concerned Member States before making proposals to the General Assembly.

Concerning section F, entitled "Documentation", the Movement is of the view that the forthcoming discussions on this issue should be conducted in the light of the implementation of paragraph 7 of resolution 58/126 and of paragraph 20 of resolution 57/300, and in accordance with the principle of providing adequate and sufficient information, as agreed by Member States.

In closing, the Non-Aligned Movement wishes one again to thank you, Mr. President, as well as the six facilitators, for the tireless efforts made throughout the session to advance the process of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

The Movement trusts that this ongoing process will continue under the chairmanship and guidance of the President-elect of the fifty-ninth session, with a view to further enhancing the authority and role of the General Assembly and improving its efficiency and effectiveness, so as to make the Assembly the central body of the United Nations, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and the Millennium Declaration, as stated in paragraph 1 of section B of the annex to resolution 58/126.

Mr. Stoffer (United States of America): Mr. President, my delegation wishes to thank you for your diligence and dedication during our yearlong effort to reform and revitalize the General Assembly. You have kept us on a steady path leading to the adoption of resolution 58/126 last December, followed by this resolution — yet another step in the process of reform.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to your highly professional staff for all of their tireless efforts as well as to every one of the facilitators for their strong commitment to help us reach a compromise text today. We believe that reform is a process that should be continually moving forward.

In the case of the General Assembly, we are taking an additional step today that we expect will be followed by others, leading ultimately to a streamlined and more relevant institution. We fully subscribe to the

proposition that the General Assembly should enhance its role and authority. It needs to do this not just to save time and resources, which we all have in short supply, but primarily because it is an urgent and compelling task that needs to be a priority mission for the Organization.

The founders of the United Nations created institutions such as the General Assembly to address the dire needs of a world ravaged by war in the middle of the twentieth century. The people we collectively represent today will demand no less of us. They will expect us to create a new General Assembly structure equipped with the tools and the means to respond promptly and effectively to the emerging challenges of the twenty-first century.

It is clear that more work needs to be done, especially to organize and structure a more focused agenda of the General Assembly, to reform the working methods and practices of the Assembly and its Main Committees, and to give new weight and consideration to the role of the General Committee to help fulfil our common goals.

Mr. President, with goodwill among all, leadership like your own and a clear determination, every one of us should be clear about what we have accomplished and what still needs to be done. We look forward to working with President-designate Ping, to lead us to the next steps in our common endeavour to enhance the authority and role of the General Assembly.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Rio Group, which has actively participated in the efforts you have led to revitalize the work of the General Assembly.

Since the beginning of the process, we have been fully and actively involved in the negotiations, given the priority attached by our Governments to this item, as the Rio Group Presidents clearly stated in last year's Cuzco Consensus.

On behalf of the Group, I am pleased to express our sincere appreciation to you, Sir, for your leadership and for the efforts you and your team, as well as the facilitators and the Secretariat, have made to move the process forward. As a result, today we have before us a resolution that, while not ideal, nonetheless represents an effective contribution to the revitalization of the Assembly.

Throughout the negotiations, the Rio Group, on several occasions, put forward the points of view of the countries of the Group concerning the proposals that had been presented in the working papers drafted during the negotiating process. We understand that the outcome of the process is necessarily a compromise solution, and we joined in the consensus on the resolution.

We welcome the fact that the General Assembly will continue to consider this item, because that will enable the Assembly both to assess progress and to explore other ways to further our common goal of strengthening the Organization.

With the provisions of resolution 58/126 and of today's resolution 58/316, the current session of the General Assembly, under your presidency, Sir, has been very successful in terms of proposed changes with a view to finding the right solutions for strengthening the multilateral system through the revitalization of the General Assembly. The fact that such concrete results have been achieved testifies to the efforts that you have made on this issue and demonstrates that, despite difficulty in reaching agreement on sensitive questions, it is possible to make progress on negotiations of this kind when negotiators have political will and dedication.

Mr. MacKay (New Zealand): I have the pleasure today to speak on behalf of Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

We have spent many months negotiating this resolution, and, Mr. President, your consistent, patient and skilled leadership throughout has been justifiably acknowledged on many occasions. We would like to take this opportunity to join others in doing so once again. We also wish to express our appreciation to the six facilitators for all the hard work they have done.

Mr. President, we entered into this process sharing your hopes for significant reform of the way we conduct our business in this body. Those hopes have not been realized. A start on the journey has perhaps been made, and the steps we have taken are in the right direction. But if we are to meet the expectations of our citizens for a more effective and relevant General Assembly within a United Nations better equipped to respond to twenty-first-century challenges, then we have a long way to go.

Our three delegations, Sir, stand ready in this regard to support your successors, who, we are sure, will wish to take the revitalization process further forward. I should again like to thank you for the leadership you have shown in taking us to this stage in the journey.

Mr. Moungara-Moussotsi (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): First, I would like to align myself with the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I warmly thank you, Mr. President, and congratulate you on the outcome of your efforts, which testify to your perseverance and the quality of the work you have carried out at the head of the General Assembly since your election.

I also thank the representative of Algeria, Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement working group, for his efforts on behalf of the Movement, which have enabled us to get across the points of view and positions of our member States.

Sir, the resolution we have just adopted under your enlightened and wise leadership, is, of course, a compromise text that does not represent all points of view. However, as others have said, it is a step forward and an indispensable step in the right direction. As a previous speaker said, it is a text that moves in the direction of United Nations reform. Sir, your work has been remarkable. You have demonstrated your ability as a diplomat and negotiator.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs prepares to assume the presidency for the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, we cannot but be impressed by your example of tenacity, courage and skill. Once again, we thank you and the facilitators, and shall try to follow in your footsteps.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position.

Now that we have adopted by consensus resolution 58/316, entitled "Further measures for the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly", allow me to reflect briefly on the progressive steps we took leading to our important decision today.

When we adopted resolution 58/126, on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, on 19 December 2003, we generally acknowledged that we had significantly advanced the process of reforming and revitalizing the Assembly. Our initiative, it was generally agreed, was a major stride towards ensuring that the Assembly maintained its position and continued to receive recognition as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations.

We sought to achieve two basic objectives in resolution 58/126. We initiated a number of specific, self-enabling actions, for example, improving the way the General Assembly does business, strengthening the Office of the President and enhancing the relationship among three of the Charter's principal organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that those provisions are already being implemented — and I may add, to good effect.

We also established in resolution 58/126 a framework of principles to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Assembly. Towards that end, we commissioned a number of reports to lay the groundwork for additional, concrete actions for the further revitalization of the Assembly. Now, after 11 meetings of the General Committee, held in open-ended informal session, and numerous consultations and discussions at all levels, we have successfully concluded this phase of our revitalization work.

Our work is not done with the adoption of resolution 58/316; it is just beginning. If the Assembly does not faithfully implement the resolution, then much of the work will have been in vain. All the matters addressed in the resolution bear centrally on our revitalization efforts. However, there are a number of important aspects of the resolution to which I wish to especially refer.

Beginning at the fifty-ninth session, the agenda of the General Assembly will be organized under a number of headings. Resolution 58/316 states the purpose for taking this action: to give a sense of structure to the work of the Assembly, to achieve a better presentation of the issues and challenges with which the Assembly deals and to make the work of the Assembly more accessible. In short, the headings will serve as a defining principle that allows Member States and the general public, for the first time, to appreciate at a glance the issues that are before the General Assembly.

Let me also refer to the resolution's provisions concerning the content of the agenda of the plenary.

The customary agenda of the plenary currently has 126 items. Of those, 47 are items dealing with organizational issues, elections, appointments and the consideration of reports of Charter organs. Therefore, we cannot adjust those items.

The Assembly determines how the remaining 79 items are considered. Of those 79 items, we have agreed that some 23, representing about 25 per cent, should be adjusted either through transfer to Main Committees, biennialization, triennialization, suspension from automatic consideration or, in a few cases, elimination. The Assembly has gone far in making the decisions that touch on so many agenda items — further, I am told, than it has ever gone before. The purpose of this far-reaching decision is to contribute to the important work of rationalizing the Assembly's agenda, in which all must remain engaged.

Indeed, the resolution recognizes that the task of rationalizing the General Assembly's customary agenda is far from over. Therefore, the Assembly commits itself to monitoring the effects of the adjustments and to continuing to make efforts to further streamline the agenda of the plenary. The Main Committees are also enjoined, in paragraph 3 (a) of section C, to contribute to that effort and to

> "give specific attention to the rationalization of their future agendas by biennialization, triennialization, clustering and the elimination of items and [to] make recommendations to the plenary of the Assembly for its decisions by 1 April 2005."

Should the provisions of the resolution's section on practices and working methods of the Main Committees be implemented faithfully, the door would be opened to transforming the way they conduct business, to the benefit of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. Let me draw attention, especially, to three of the provisions concerning the work of the Main Committees that are likely to have particular impact.

The first provision to which I wish to refer is that calling on all Main Committees to adopt a provisional programme of work at the end of session for the next session to help future sessions plan, prepare and organize, and review documentation requirements related to the programme. This is more than a technical provision; now all Main Committees will be required to look ahead to the next session of the General Assembly and, in particular, at the reporting implications of their decisions.

Main Committees tend to take discrete decisions on the issues before them. Consequently, the Committees and, indeed, the General Assembly have no means by which to overview the collective implications of the outcomes of Committee and plenary meetings. The review now required of Main Committees might reveal overlaps in the decisions and show where requests for reports might be unduly onerous for the Secretariat to prepare and for delegations to absorb.

The second provision to which I would wish to refer calls for the introduction of "question time" formats in all Main Committees. The purpose of that decision is to enable a dynamic and candid exchange with heads of departments and offices, representatives of the Secretary-General and special rapporteurs. The provision will introduce greater transparency in the relationship between the Secretariat and member States.

As members would know, much of my time in recent years has been dedicated to the work of the United Nations — as Permanent Representative of Saint Lucia, Minister of External Affairs of Saint Lucia and, since September 2003, as President of the General Assembly. I must say that, over the years, I have begun to notice disquiet on the part of member States, stemming from a sense that they are not always being kept fully informed about developments or that proposals on matters of critical concern are put before them on which adequate consultations may not have taken place. I would not wish to comment on the merit of those concerns. It is my view, however, that the device of question time should allow for candid questioning and equally candid responses that would help address any concerns, including on the matter of transparency.

The third provision to which I would wish to refer is that which mandates that interactive debates and panel discussions shall be utilized or expanded by all Main Committees, beginning with the fifty-ninth session. Some Main Committees already make good use of this method of work, to good effect. I believe such mechanisms to be invaluable tools for ensuring important interchanges about policy developments and, as with question time, to engage in dynamic and candid discussions, unconstrained by diplomatic nuances.

Interactive debates and panel discussions are an important means, I believe, of keeping the United Nations abreast of new issues and ideas.

The section of the resolution on the General Committee also represents an important institutional development. The provision of resolution 58/126, contained in paragraph 1 of section B, that the General Committee should

> "play the leading role in advising the General Assembly on the efficient organization, coordination and management of its work"

has been a guiding principle for my presidency from the beginning. While taking cognizance that its composition was such that member States were unwilling to grant it recognition as the Bureau of the plenary, I have sought to make the General Committee a more effective body. My view, in this regard, is that inadequacies, real and perceived, in the General Committee could be overcome, working within the existing rules of procedure of the Assembly.

I am sure we all agree that the General Committee has, over the past 10 months, become a more dynamic institutional tool. It was through the General Committee, for example, that the practice of informal briefings for delegations on topical issues was put in place. Members will recall that, during my presidency, briefings have been held on the budget, staff security and the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The resolution we have adopted recognizes those briefings as a positive experience and encourages the General Committee to continue to hold them. Importantly, it was through the General Committee, meeting in open-ended informal session, that the deliberations on the content of the resolution took place and that, as result, we now have a consensus text.

This new, more dynamic approach to the General Committee is to continue, in line with the provisions of the resolution. Six concrete responsibilities are given to the General Committee. The most novel is the provision which calls on the Secretary-General to present to the General Committee and, through it, to the General Assembly the proposed programme of work of the forthcoming session of the Assembly with relevant, related information on the status of documentation. This is a potentially far-reaching provision, as it will provide delegations with a tool to better plan and programme the work of the Assembly on an annual basis.

Currently, Member States do not begin to consider a programme of work for the Assembly until the third week in September, and that does not include a programme of work for the plenary. Moreover, the work programme of each Main Committee is considered separately and independently; coordination is not an issue in that exercise. I would encourage the Secretariat to give careful consideration to the preparation of the newly-mandated report so that member States will have a thorough product before them. My understanding of the provision is that the first report of that nature will be presented to the General Committee in July 2004. I look forward to receiving the report.

Let me refer to one further issue I consider to be of critical importance and which we have been discussing since last year. It is a proposal to reorder the work of the General Assembly by scheduling it over two substantive periods. That proposal has the strong support of many delegations, particularly those from small States.

I continue to hold the view that the proposal has merit for all delegations, in that it will permit them to better appreciate, to better focus and therefore to better act on the extraordinary number of issues that the Assembly seeks to address in the September-to-December period every year. I think it important to point out that, within that four-month period last year, we considered 276 items and sub-items; 347 reports totalling 5,550 pages were submitted to us; and we adopted 287 resolutions. It is not clear to me why we should continue to operate in that fashion.

When the General Assembly, at its fifty-ninth session, resumes consideration of the proposal aimed at scheduling the work of the Assembly over two substantive periods, Member States will have had more time to consider that important proposal. I trust that, at that time, delegations will give more measured and favourable consideration to this issue.

We have come a long way in our efforts to revitalize the General Assembly during its fifty-eighth session. Working together, we have achieved a result about which we can all be justly pleased. Let me here recognize all those who have worked tirelessly to show beyond doubt that we are serious about the revitalization of the General Assembly. I am most

appreciative to my facilitators: the Permanent Representatives of Algeria, Jamaica, the Netherlands, Singapore, Slovenia and South Africa. Let me break with tradition by asking the Assembly to give them a round of applause.

I am also most appreciative to the various groups and delegations that have provided input into the process and to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, which provided active background information and support for the process. At this stage, it would remiss of me if I did not also recognize the excellent work done by my Chef de Cabinet and by my Senior Adviser. I ask the Assembly to give them a round of applause as well. Indeed, the Assembly itself deserves applause for what it has achieved.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 55.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.